

Full Abuse & Prevention Policy For Children & Youth Leaders/Volunteers

As a community, Iron Works Church is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors, and holding abusers accountable. Our commitments come from God, who is a refuge for the abused and never ignores their cry (Psalm 9:9, 12). Our community seeks to embody God's priority of justice for the vulnerable that comes with his Kingdom.

Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime), when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is often powerless to stop it. Abuse is sadly a common reality in this world. As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be "wise as serpents." (Matthew 10:16) We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy.

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of abuse.

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, predatory individuals often seek environments with vulnerable people. Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. This policy only states what we all must take ownership of in our community as we together walk with God who loves justice and hates oppression.

Definitions:

Abuse: There are many types of abuse. Please see "Definitions of Abuse" addendum for more information.

Child/Children – Refers to individuals of ages from newborn to 5th grade.

Youth – Refers to individuals of ages from 6th grade to age 17 (or who are still in high school).

Administrative Policy

Safeguarding Team

The Safeguarding Team is responsible for equipping the community of Iron Works Church for effective prevention and response. Currently, our Safeguarding Team is comprised of a group of 3-6 members and includes women and men.

Screening of Children & Youth Volunteers

Members of Iron Works Church are invited to volunteer with the Children's and Youth Ministries as long as they meet the following requirements:

- The completion of a written [application](#) including questions related to abuse and protecting the vulnerable.
- Three references to be contacted
- The following [clearances](#):

- Child Abuse Clearance
- PA State Police Clearance
- FBI criminal record check ([Affidavit](#) can be submitted in place of FBI check for PA residents who have lived in PA for 10 years)
- Applicants need resubmit background checks if there is a break in service/employment
- Clearances must be obtained every 5 years
- An interview that explores a candidate's written application and includes questions related to abuse, protecting the vulnerable, and the Iron Works Church Abuse Policy

If the screening process yields information that an individual abused a child or others in any way, or has been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, that individual may NOT work with children or vulnerable adults in any capacity. If any potentially concerning information comes to light OR if the screening process shows that a candidate has ever been accused or convicted of any type of crime, Iron Works Church may consult with an expert to help assess the situation.

Training

The staff, pastors, officers, volunteers, and members will have continuing education opportunities on child abuse prevention and harassment issues available at a minimum of every other year and will be required for all leaders/volunteers working with children every year. Training will be made available to those that are unable to attend the meetings in-person.

Healthy Boundaries with Children/Youth

At all times our community upholds the following standards of respect and safety. This policy applies to official church activities on or off church property.

Show respect in physical touch, space, and visibility:

- Appropriate touch, whether an adult or child, should always be welcomed by the person (If you are not sure, just ask - e.g. Can I give you a hug?).
- Touch within a significant power difference should be observable to others (e.g. between a non-parent adult and a child).
 - Touch should never occur in the swimsuit area of a child.
 - Touch such as wrestling or tickling a child should not be done by an adult/individual that is not a parent.
 - Hands should never be placed on another person's child in discipline (examples: spanking, grabbing arm or chin, etc.).
 - One exception to this policy is for nursery workers who need to pick up an infant/toddler to care for their needs, using appropriate handling and touch. (Please refer to [nursery](#) policy for more details.)
- Children who need assistance in the restroom outside of the children's ministry must be helped by their own parent or guardian. Within the children's ministry, all diapering or assistance must be observable by two volunteers and two can include the one diapering.
- Be aware and considerate of children/youth's personal space: Notice body language and facial expressions.

- Stay in visible and accountable spaces: Every effort should be made to not be alone with a child who is not their own child (including giving rides unless given permission for each ride by parent/guardian.) Please see appendices for individual age group policies for more information and specifics on 1:1 interactions and exceptions.

Show respect in your words:

- Determine to use words that convey the respect always due to others.
- Avoid any language that belittles or objectifies (e.g. commenting on a child/youth's body or sexual attractiveness)
- Avoid sexualized comments including inappropriate jokes or stories (or sharing media)
- Avoid volunteering inappropriately intimate information or asking a child/youth to reveal intimate details or personal information.

It is always the responsibility of the person in the position of greater power to maintain appropriate boundaries with children/youth. The following behaviors are unacceptable by children/youth leader:

- Any violation of boundaries laid out in this policy
- Sexual attention, comments, or unwanted or inappropriate physical touch
- Behavior or words that discriminate, belittle or threaten a child.

Responding to Boundary Violations

Iron Works Church takes all policy violations and all concerns related to respect and safety seriously. Anyone who experiences or has information regarding concerning behavior, crossing boundaries, or violating this policy in any way should document it and speak up as soon as possible to the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Team will document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate with one another on any appropriate response and accountability.

Immediate Response Protocols

1. If there is a disclosure of abuse, any evidence or knowledge of abuse, or any reasonable belief of abuse against a minor (age 17 or younger) all adults within Iron Works Church must immediately report abuse or suspected abuse of children to:
 - a. **Chester County Child, Youth and Families** office which takes reports 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at **610-344-5800**
 - b. Or **Childline** at **1-800-932-0313**
 - c. If you need help doing this, please contact the Safeguarding Team.
2. Child abuse may also be reported to a local police department. DO NOT try to investigate the matter first before reporting. The session's responsibility in spiritual matters and shepherding will not impede any investigation by the authorities. Any delay in reporting could result in a loss of critical evidence, potentially be a violation of the law, and worst of all, enable the continued abuse of vulnerable children or adults. After the report, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team. If the victim is now an adult,

but the abuse was against them as a minor, we will support them and respect their agency in reporting.

3. After you have reported abuse to law enforcement and Child or Adult Protective Services, please contact a member of the Safeguarding Team or a pastor as soon as possible. If the alleged perpetrator is within Iron Works Church, upon recommendation from the Safeguarding Team, the Session shall immediately place the alleged offender on administrative leave or leave of absence for volunteers/members/regular attenders (individual will be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.) He/she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or witnesses until the completion of any investigations and/or Iron Works Church has sufficient information to make a determination concerning any personnel decisions and/or other accountability. The Safeguarding Team shall coordinate any immediate steps required for the protection of the vulnerable and the community and inform the Pastoral team and the Session. Any person connected to an allegation, including a family member or mentor must recuse themselves from response, whether a member of the Safeguarding Team, or Session.

Any victim and/or witness who has reported has a right for their privacy and identity to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for Iron Works Church to share certain information in order to safeguard other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

It is important to remember if a child/youth discloses abuse to you to provide support in the following ways:

1. Listening and staying calm
2. Affirming without judgment
3. Validating strong emotions (such as anger, betrayal, and confusion)
4. Respecting their privacy
5. Encouraging and empowering their agency
6. Encouraging them to seek professional medical or mental health care as appropriate

Retaliation

Iron Works Church prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who are involved in any activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or potential evidence, or cooperating in a criminal or independent investigation. Retaliation can take many forms, including, but not limited to, shunning, violence, threats, or intimidation that would discourage some persons from engaging in activity required or encouraged by this policy. Actions in response to a good faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns, or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to the Safeguarding Team or a member of the Session. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation will be held accountable under this policy.